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AUTHOR Coombe, Edmund
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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a historical overview of sheltered workshops and presents information about service innovations and mission expansion. The first workshop in the United States was the Perkins Institute, opened in 1837 for individuals with visual handicaps. This workshop was typical of "categorical" workshops that were established during this time to serve people with particular disabilities. Many workshops were private non-profit organizations, and almost no workshops were fully funded by public or private sources. Rural community sheltered workshops that have operated for over 20 years have changed and are now more likely to resemble a small business than a rehabilitation facility. Many facilities are involved in service contracts related to collating, mailing, packaging, labeling, and maid/janitorial services. Many employees or clients of today's workshops transitioned from school without the benefits of a free and appropriate education (mandated under PL-94-142, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and program options such as vocational education. One southeastern rural state has developed well managed and innovative community sheltered workshops. This state has 29 workshops that serve over 2,000 individuals. The shops recently reported $5.25 million in annual sales of goods and services and placed 8 percent of their employees or clients in competitive employment. Only 13 percent of their budgets come from state dollars, leaving 87 percent to be raised by contracts, sales, and services. This paper suggests that rural community or regional workshops should be evaluated in three major areas: the workshop as a business, service to potential employers, and service to employees and clients. (LP)

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SHELTERED WORKSHOPS AND TRANSITION: OLD BOTTLES, NEW WINE?

EDMUND COOMBE
WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY

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Edmund Coombe
West Virginia University

Sheltered workshops and transition: Old bottles, new wine?

Sheltered workshops can be compared to old bottles, some would save them, even thinking they are valued antiques, while others would smash them and discard them. Sheltered workshops are indeed old, they go back about four hundred years to one established by St. Vincent de Paul at the end of the 16th century in Paris. The goal of providing a protected (noncompetitive) work environment first appeared in the United States about 150 years ago, dating from the Perkins Institute in 1837 where John Pringle was the first workshop director (Nelson, 1971). The value of sheltered workshops has long been disputed, but in the past two decades concepts such as normalization, mainstreaming and transition have increasingly raised questions about these largely segregated facilities. As parents, special educators, and adult service providers began devising transition plans in the 1980's, traditional workshops were seen by many as inappropriate postsecondary destinations for students with disabilities. In fact, some states have adopted policies of drastically reducing allocations to sheltered workshops and diverting funds to programs such as supported employment. In other states, including some which are largely rural with high unemployment rates, the "old bottles" are mainstays of the local economy. Some of these workshops have seen "new wine" poured into them in the form of incentives for service innovations and mission expansion. This paper provides an overview of the "old bottles," presents information on the transition process, and allows the reader to sample the "new wine."

Historical overview of the "old bottles" (sheltered workshops)

The workshop associated with the Perkins Institute for individuals with visual handicaps, which opened in 1837 and closed in 1951 after 114 years of operation, was illustrative of "categorical" workshops. Categorical workshops were established to serve a particular disability. Public financed community workshops for individuals with visual handicaps had their beginning in Oakland, California in 1885. These categorical workshops multiplied and in the early 1960's the National Industries for the Blind reported 120 workshops serving approximately 5,000 workers. Part of the reason for this growth can be attributed to the 1938 Wagner-O'Day Act (now the Javitz-Wagner-O'Day Act) which mandated government purchases of certain workshop products (Nelson, 1971).

In addition to providing a protected work environment many workshops established another goal for their clients/employees - entry into or return to competitive employment. This was true of some other "categorical" workshops which were organized for tuberculosis patients, individuals with physical disabilities, and individuals with emotional disturbance. Many of the latter were similar to the Perkins Institute shop in that they were connected with public or private residential facilities (institutions). These workshops were often referred to as rehabilitation facilities.

Many sheltered workshops are private not for profit organizations, almost none of these workshops are fully funded by public or private sources. The "salvage shops," which may be exemplified by Goodwill Industries, are illustrative of not for profit shops. Many of these shops, which also had their beginnings in the last century, were started by individuals or organizations with a religious affiliation and served poor and disadvantaged as well as individuals with disabilities. Around the middle of this century these shops expanded their services and diversified from salvaging and refurbishing into subcontracting. In the late 1960's Goodwill workshops reported serving 91,500 individuals through 135 shops (Nelson, 1971).

Community workshops for individuals with mental retardation, which got underway in the middle of this century, are also illustrative of not for profit organizations. Because many extant categorical workshops would not accept individuals with mental retardation, with the exception of some who

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functioned in the mild range, community workshops were initally established by parent groups. Some of these workshops had other missions and services such as "preschool" programs. In 1957 the National Association for Retarded Children (NARC, now ARC-US) reported 108 workshops for individuals with mental retardation. Much of the growth of these workshops came about because of the 1954 Vocational Rehabilitation Act amendments which provided 150 research and development grants over a 10 year period. By the end of the 1960's there were 500 workshops certified by the U.S. Department of Labor serving about 14,000 individuals with mental retardation (Nelson, 1971).

According to Kiernan and his colleagues: "the development of employment training programs is following a course similar to that of residential services." In a similar fashion to large institutions giving way to community living arrangements for individuals with disabilities, Kiernan et. al. indicated that (various) changes "have pointed out the need for and appropriateness of providing employment services for adults with severe disabilities in integrated work settings (Kiernan, Schalock & Knutson, 1989 p. 3)." Although Kiernan and his colleagues may be correct, sheltered workshops remain a major provider of employment and employment services for individuals with disabilities. The average number of workshops per state may be as high as 100 as various estimates of the total number of workshops in the United States during the 1970's and 1980's range between 5,000 and 6,000. Table I supplies some information on the types, common elements, and business activities of todays sheltered workshops.

Table I Sheltered Workshops Information

Types:
1. Evaluation and training for (re) entry into competitive employment (transitional or rehabilitation workshop)
2. Extended employment workshop (long term full or part-time inhouse employment).
3. Work Activities Center (emphasis on training and activities of daily living, often not on preparation for competitive employment).

Note: There is a possiblity that rural community workshops may offer services of all three types.

Common elements:
1. Offer rehabilitation services, employment training, and full employment.
2.Provide meaningful work - they are businesses

Business activities:
1. Subcontracting - completion of specific tasks for a manufacturer (e.g., assembling and packing)
2. Prime contracting/manufacturing - design, produce, market, and deliver or ship product.
3. Reclamation - restore salavageable material for possible sale
4. Service contract - provide service such as maintenance of building, grounds to businesses
5. Recycling

Adapted from Heward & Orlansky (1984). Exceptional Children. Columbus, OH: Merrill Co.

Research on sheltered workshops is not plentiful, but there are a number of national organizations such as the National Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (NARF) and the National Industries for the severely handicapped (NISH) which periodically survey their members. These surveys have been conducted to establish data bases on production and service capabilities and to match these with possible Javits-Wagner-O'Day contracts. Recent interest by researchers in the follow-up of individuals with disabilities who are transitioning from school has revealed some information about sheltered workshops. For example, Schalock, McGaughney & Kiernan (1989) conducted a national survey of vocational rehabilitation facilities. They contacted 2,500+ facilities and reported that of the over 150,000 individuals served about16-18% were placed in nonsheltered settings (8% in competitive employment and 8% in supported and transitional employment). Individuals placed in the nonsheltered settings had earnings which at least doubled those of the

sheltered workers (e.g., $3.00+ hr. v. $1.50 hr.). Two-thirds of the sheltered workers were developmentally disabled and one-third of sheltered workers worked full time. Some part-time nonsheltered employees returned to the workshop for additional work (Schalock et. al., 1989). Other researchers have focused on workshop employees/clients, conducting studies on quality of life variables, community adjustment variables, and occupational information and vocational interest variables.

Transition process and services

Virtually everyone in special education, rehabilitation, and related human services fields is familiar with the results from the myriad of follow-up and follow-along studies investigating the transition process of youth with disabilities. Studies done in the mid 1980's reported unemployment rates of transitioning students as high as 80% and even drops in the fulltime employment rate from 29.3% in 1972 to 27.4 % in 1984 (Habeck, Glavid, Frey, Chadderden & Tate, 1985). Nearly a decade later this picture has changed somewhat as results indicate that employment rates have improved for some individuals with disabilities, but not for others. A recent report on transition outcomes in Iowa cites that about 50% of individuals with learning disabilities were employed fulltime (Sitlington, Frank & Carson, 1992). Other researchers in Washington found that no individuals with behavior disorders were earning minimum wage and 30% were not engaged in any meaningful activity two years after leaving school (Edgar & Levine, 1987). Individuals with mental retardation in the mild range have employment levels slightly lower than their peers with learning disabilities (Sitlington et. al., 1992), while individuals with moderate to severe retardation often fare even worse than their peers with behavior disorders.

There may be many ways to improve the transition process for individuals with disabilities such as one approach suggested in much of the transition literature - utilizing a comprehensive array of services. (Examples from the Idaho Department of Education of transition planning materials, which include desired services, are attached as Appendices A and B). Utilizing an array of services approach may be feasible in metropolitan areas, but finding and accessing adult services in many rural areas is difficult. A previously cited study, for example, found that in Iowa less than 10% of the more than 600 individuals with mild disabilities availed themselves of post secondary programming or contacted vocational rehabilitation services. Instead, more than 80% reported finding their jobs (which were primarily as laborers or service providers) themselves or with the help of family and friends, even though over 60% were aware of and had contacted either the Iowa Job Service or JTPA (Sitlington et. al.,1992). It appears that many individuals with mild disabilities might be able to effect successful transition with a little help from their friends, or by using services which are available throughout the country. But, for the five percent employed in sheltered workshops and the 20% reported unemployed in the Iowa study, there seems to be a need for other answers.

"New wine:" Change and innovation in rural sheltered workshops

Community sheltered workshops in rural areas which have operated for more than twenty years have changed, they are now more likely to resemble a small business than a rehabilitation facility. Their mission and goals have, by and large, remained the same and, in many cases, their employees/clients have not changed, but the economy is very different. In the early 1970's almost 30% of all jobs were in manufacturing; consequently, much of the work in sheltered workshops was subcontracted from manufacturers. The late 1980's saw less than 20% of all jobs in manufacturing with over a million employees lost to automation or other technological advances - the large employment gains were found in service industries. A survey conducted in 1980 of the activities of 3,500 facilities (with a return rate of 737 or 48%) indicated that assembling electrical/electronic products was done more than any other job, while hardware assembly, pen/pencil assembly and reworking or building wooden products (e.g., pallets) made up six of the next highest nine. Many facilities were also involved in service contracts, the top five were:

collating, mailing, packaging, labeling, and maid/janitorial (Walls, Haught & Crist,1982). In these same sheltered workshops a decade later one is not apt to find many power tools for building wooden products or heat sealers for packaging subcontracted products. Instead, one will probably see much service related work, many prime contracts (manufactured products), and various services including case manadement and supported employment.

Many of the employees/clients of todays workshops transitioned from school without the benefits of a free and appropriate education (under PL-94-142) and program options such as vocational education. A follow-up survey done in Colorado of 76 workers may be indicative of current sheltered workshop employees. These workers average age was 35 years (62% between 19 and 25), 75% of them were individuals with mental retardation, over 60% had had no contact with Vocational Rehabilitation, 64% were employed full-time in a workshop, 28% were in supported employment, and 8% were competitively employed on a full-time basis (Sands, Kozleski & Goodwin, 1992). Although the numbers reported above in supported employment are somewhat higher than the national study previously cited (Shalock et. al. 1989), the numbers of individuals in competitive employment and, particularly, in workshops are similar. Those who have been employees/clients in workshops may have seen their wages change considerably over the last decade. Several studies on workshop earnings are cited by Kiernan and his colleagues: in 1981, for example, individuals with mental retardation averaged $417 per year, while a 1986 study reported average yearly earnings at $1,635 or about 1/3 of the prevailing minimum wage (Kiernan et. al., 1989). Recent reports from sheltered workshops in the author's state of residence indicate a range of average yearly earnings from a low of about $4,000 to a high of about $10,000. These wage increases could probably not have been possible without good business management and the ability to (re)train existing employees for new skills.

Other examples of how community sheltered workshops in rural areas have become well managed businesses and innovators can be drawn from all over the United States, but only information and illustrations from one rural southeastern state, the author's state of residence, will be used. Demographic data indicate that the State has one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation, one of the highest rates of health problems, and about 1% of the population applies annualy for disability. There are 29 workshops serving over 2,000 individuals (about .008% of the total population) or about 70 per workshop. These shops had $5.25 million in recently reported annual sales of goods and services to the State and placed 8% of their employees/clients in competitive employment. Only 13% (about $1.7 million) of their budgets come from State dollars, leaving 87% to be raised by contracts, sales and services. An example of a recent contract was one negotiated by the Rehabilitation Service Office with the State Department of Transportation to have the workshops provide maintenance in all rest areas of the State's interstate highway system. Product manufacture and sales examples include: one workshop which makes toys and sells them nationwide through a catalogue, another which has a growing business in silk screening "T" and sweat shirts, and one which manufactures and markets hammocks. In the service area, in addition to maintenance type contracts and food sales, one workshop has recently initiated a service to pick up, remanufacture, and deliver laser printer cartridges to regional businesses on a one day turnaround. Improved services to employees/clients are also being addressed through the establishment of pilot case management programs in several workshops and cooperative training of staff to provide increased supported employment programs. In order to keep abreast of activities, directors attend monthly regional planning meetings where ideas are exchanged and potential problems are discussed.

Rural community or regional sheltered workshops in any part of the country can be evaluated to ascertain if they are offering a wide range of services for all individuals with disabilities. Three major areas should be evaluated: the workshop as a business, service to potential employers, and service to employees/clients. The following Table is offered as an example and can be used as a check list to assess workshops in your locale.

Table II
Community Sheltered Workshop Checklist

I. Business Activities

A. Administration - 1.Experience of Admns. 2. Numbers sufficient to manage size of facility (include budget size and number of employees and staff).

B. Accounting/ Budget - 1. Experience of Budget Admn. 2. Ratio of staff to employee salaries. 3. Sources of income. 4. Production and operating costs.

C. Contract procurement and bidding - 1. Experience of Admn. 2. Number and vatiety of contracts. 3. Contracts match employee skills. 4. Wage setting process.

D. Employee Supervision/Training - 1. Experience of Supervisors. 2. Employee-job match. 3. Work-site accomodations. 4. Other on-site training opportunities used (e.g., facility maintenance, food services, shipping and receiving, office work).

E. Community Relations - 1. Board of Directors (Active, represent cross section of community). 2. Volunteers - Coordinator to solicit and offer orientation and training.

II. Service to potential employers

A. Supported employment - 1. Experiences of job procurers and coaches. 2. Knowledge of employers' business. 3. Work-site accomodations. 4. Employer appreciation activities.

B. Consultation activities -1. Information provided on Tax Incentives, Americans with Disabilities Act provisions etc. 2. Facility open house/career days.

C. Contracts - Examples of previous contracts. Also refer to C. (above).

III. Service to employees/clients

1. Facility orientation 2. Evaluation 3. Case Management and counseling
4. Day Treatment (incl. daily living, social recreational skills, and related services).
5. Employment and work adjustment training 6. Job/Career exploration
7. Supported employment/JTPA (hours working) 8. Networking
9. Job placement 10. Transportation
11. Benefits (incl. retirement plan) 12. Adult education programs

The preceeding Table does not offer suggestions for staff numbers or ratios, as each facility is unique in employees, staff, and administration. A good barometer to begin an assessment is to look at the number of hours employees/clients work and their wages including those on-site and in supported employment or JTPA programs. Supported employment regulations permit employment for less than twenty hours a week and some employees may be working on and off-site. Many workshops operate on thirty to thirty five hour weeks. A second good measure, as Table II (I. D. 4.) illustrates, is to check if the workshop, as a business, is utilizing all aspects of its own operations to offer employees job exploration and training experiences. A final, very revealing indicator, is to ask a number of people in your area (particularly people in business and industry) if they are familiar with the sheltered workshop. The results of this straw poll may tell you more than any other type of assessment.

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